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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 001312

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN, NSC FOR DAVID MERKEL

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TX](#) [TI](#) [UZ](#) [US](#)

SUBJECT: A/S BOUCHER'S MEETING WITH TAJIKISTAN'S PRESIDENT
RAHMONOV: TAJIK REFORM AND UZBEKISTAN

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Jennifer L. Brush for reasons 1.4 (B)
and (D).

Summary

1. (C) Taking the opportunity to meet prior to the wreath laying for Niyazov's funeral, visiting A/S Boucher and Charge met with President of Tajikistan, Imomali Rahmonov, and discussed Rahmonov's views on Turkmenistan's future, U.S. relations with Uzbekistan, energy cooperation, and the situation in Afghanistan. Rahmonov was not optimistic that the change in leadership would result in new opportunities for cooperation, and believed that the next leader of Turkmenistan will continue Niyazov's current policies. Rahmonov blamed President of Uzbekistan Karimov's ambitions for the deterioration in USG-Uzbek relations, and said that any opportunity for change and openness depended on Karimov personally. Discussing Tajik politics, Rahmonov noted the recent structural reforms in his government that abolished 27 agencies, and expressed pride in the new generation he has introduced as part of the process. On Afghanistan, Rahmonov suggested that the media has exaggerated the current situation, but stated that engaging Pakistan and involving them on energy deals was a key to securing peace. Highlighting the significance of USG relations with Uzbekistan to all Central Asian nations, Rahmonov returned to the U.S.' vision of Uzbek relations, and suggested hopefully that the U.S. would work with the European Union to re-engage with Uzbekistan. End Summary.

MORE OF THE SAME - FOR NOW

2. (C) Early on the morning of December 24, A/S Boucher and Charge met in Ashgabat at the Grand Turkmen Hotel with Tajik President Rahmonov, who was in town for the funeral of President Niyazov. Opening with congratulations for Rahmonov's recent re-election, A/S Boucher noted the unusual circumstance under which the meeting took place. While it was too early to tell which direction Turkmenistan's new leadership would follow, Boucher said the U.S. hoped for increased cooperation. Rahmonov responded that his prognosis was "ne ochen" (not very good), and that, following the

December 26 special session of the Halk Maslahaty (People's Council), the next leader would continue Niyazov's policies. A/S suggested that the public expected positive change from the new leaders and hoped for a peaceful transition, but Rahmonov stated that peace was the most important issue.

KARIMOV - PERSONALLY - TO BLAME

13. (C) In response to A/S Boucher's comment regarding the regional importance of openness and change, Rahmonov stated "everything depends on Uzbekistan." Noting the U.S. "had" good relations with Uzbekistan, he said that "Karimov's ambitions ruined everything." Rahmonov suggested that Niyazov's policies made it easier for Karimov to behave as he did, and that Niyazov had a more humane character than Karimov. Rahmonov declared that Turkmenistan and Tajikistan maintained friendly relations from the beginning, in part because of their position in Soviet times as the most deprived republics. Rahmonov also noted that he studied in Ashgabat in 1971, and later worked in Mary as an assembler. At that time, he said that Ashgabat was "just a town - not a capital," and spoke admiringly of the new city Niyazov left behind for the people.

14. (C) A/S Boucher expressed hope that new leadership in Turkmenistan would improve cooperation with Afghanistan on issues such as narcotics control, like the current USG relationship with Tajikistan. Rahmonov concurred, and said that this was necessary because they shared common borders. Acknowledging Turkmenistan's currently poor bilateral relationship with Uzbekistan, he said Turkmenistan must cooperate with its other neighbors, specifically Afghanistan and Iran.

ASHGABAT 00001312 002 OF 003

BIG HOPES FOR TAJIKISTAN'S FUTURE

15. (C) Responding to A/S Boucher's desire to continue USG support for border security and police training with Tajikistan, Rahmonov took the opportunity to highlight his "big hopes" for the "serious reforms" instituted following his re-election. He noted the abolishment of 27 agencies and stated that the former 28 cabinet positions had been reduced to 17. Rahmonov declared that these reforms had introduced a "young generation" to government and he proudly stated 80% of cadre among local governments has been changed. Fighting corruption would be a priority, and Rahmonov hoped to achieve demonstrable success after one year.

16. (C) While noting that Tajikistan has enjoyed 7-8% growth over the last year, Rahmonov declared that this was not enough. He stated that he hoped for continued USG support to accomplish his goals. Rahmonov spoke of the four bridges that have already been built between Tajikistan and Afghanistan and announced that they will start two more next year in Pyanj and Gorno Badakshan (in eastern Tajikistan).

REGIONAL VISION FOR ENERGY COOPERATION

17. (C) In January, Rahmonov advised that construction will start on a \$300 million power line to Kabul, and he stated that he will travel to China on January 15 to discuss financing for 3 new hydroelectric stations. Regarding U.S. firm American Electric Systems (AES), Rahmonov indicated his desire to see this project connect Kazakhstan and Tajikistan via Kyrgyzstan - and bypass Uzbekistan. Rahmonov noted that the recent energy conference in Dushanbe, financed by the USG (via Trade Development Authority), was "big assistance," and confirmed that developing its hydroelectric energy potential is a priority for Tajikistan.

DON'T FORGET PAKISTAN

¶18. (C) A/S Boucher advised that the USG planned to announce a new package of cooperation with Afghanistan in the new few months. This funding will help to stabilize the country by supporting the police and military forces. It will also help the country develop its infrastructure, including roads and energy grid, and strengthen internal efforts to fight narcotics cultivation and trafficking. Rahmonov replied that it was important to increase attention to these issues, and although he believed that the media had exaggerated the situation, he acknowledged additional help is needed. Rahmonov shared that in a recent meeting with France's Minister of Defense, he learned that France intended to divide its forces in Afghanistan into two parts, one focused on the fight against terrorism, the other for medical and humanitarian issues.

¶19. (C) Rahmonov urged that the international community should pay close attention to its relations with Pakistan. Noting that one of the objectives in building a regional energy market was the development of exports to Pakistan via Afghanistan, Rahmonov reiterated that Pakistan's support was essential. Maintaining strong support should be a priority in ongoing discussions.

USG RELATIONS WITH UZBEKISTAN -----

¶10. (C) A/S Boucher closed by noting that, with Rahmonov's re-election now past, Tajikistan's next major elections would be the parliamentary elections in 2010. Between now and then, the USG hoped to actively cooperate with the Government of Tajikistan. Acknowledging that "some don't like this," Rahmonov responded that Tajikistan maintained an open door and would work with all nations.

¶11. (C) Rahmonov noted that Europe was seeking a reopening

ASHGABAT 00001312 003 OF 003

with Uzbekistan, but in the meantime, Kyrgyzstan was suffering from the lack of good relations and asked for A/S Boucher's vision of where the relationship would go. A/S Boucher replied that, since his meeting with President Karimov in October, the Government of Uzbekistan had done the opposite of everything he asked it to do. Our door remained open to cooperation, he stated, but the USG expected real actions from Uzbekistan. One example was a recent conference on New Delhi, when the Uzbek delegation announced only that it had nothing to say when called upon for comments.

¶12. (C) Looking for an opening, Rahmonov then suggested that perhaps the USG could rebuild ties by working through the European Union. A/S Boucher clarified that the USG had encouraged the Europeans to try this approach while at the same time maintaining their standards. He believed that the German Government would use its Presidency of the EU to reengage with the Government of Uzbekistan.

¶13. (C) Slightly exasperated, Rahmonov stated that he "didn't believe" the personal attitude of Karimov, who "says one thing and does another." A/S Boucher added that Karimov used to enjoy balancing relations, but now has just one friend. Rahmonov ended the meeting by stating enigmatically that Russia is not Karimov's only friend.

BRUSH